

The NAIS in Tennessee – The Facts

Background:

Discussions with industry led working groups about developing a National Animal Identification System have been ongoing for years. Serious animal disease outbreaks in other parts of the world, such as the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2001, and the potential for acts of agri-terrorism brought development of an animal tracing system to the forefront in disease protection efforts. Time is the most critical factor in stopping the spread of highly contagious diseases such as FMD, avian influenza or other foreign animal diseases that could decimate livestock and cripple the U.S. agricultural economy. The goal of the NAIS is to safeguard animal and public health by being able to trace the movement of diseased or exposed animals within 48 hours.

The NAIS is a voluntary program being implemented by USDA with input from states and industry led working groups. The first step in building the NAIS is to register all locations, or premises, where livestock are congregated. The second step is to identify individual animals, or lots of animals for those species that typically move in groups. The final step is to integrate private database systems with the NAIS into a seamless, compatible network for tracing livestock movement.

Fact or Fiction?

FICTION: *The NAIS is for “big” agriculture and designed to drive small producers and hobby farmers out of business.*

FACT: Highly infectious animal diseases don't discriminate between small and large, or hobby and commercial producers of livestock. The NAIS is designed to protect the health of all livestock and to limit the impact of disease outbreaks to all producers. By participating in the system, producers may be able to help avoid the use of broad, more costly disease control responses in the event of an outbreak.

FICTION: *The NAIS is a conspiracy by government and others to control my business and to use my personal information for other purposes.*

FACT: Information gathered under the NAIS in Tennessee is protected and held confidential under state law. The NAIS will be accessed by state and federal animal health officials for the purposes of responding to, monitoring for and controlling diseases in the event of an outbreak. Proprietary information is not necessary and is not being gathered for the NAIS. Only basic information such as a premises contact, location and species type is required for the system to work.

FICTION: *If I participate in the animal ID system, my livestock will be tracked by satellite.*

FACT: Identification methods under consideration are not capable of or designed for satellite tracking and are not tied to Global Positioning System (satellite) coordinates. Satellite tracking would be impractical, unnecessary and too costly. Under the NAIS, information on livestock movement will only be gathered at the point of commerce and accessed in the event of an animal disease outbreak.

FICTION: *The NAIS is a costly, impractical effort to prevent mad cow disease.*

FACT: While helpful in tracing animals of interest in cases of non-contagious diseases such as BSE, or mad cow disease, the goal of the NAIS is not specific to BSE. The greatest benefit for the NAIS is to guard against highly contagious diseases that could affect both animals and humans. The NAIS is also important to homeland security in guarding against threats of intentionally introduced diseases.

FICTION: *The NAIS is expensive and producers will ultimately have to bear the burden of paying for it.*

FACT: Animal identification is an affordable safeguard especially when compared with the cost of not having an animal identification system. A single outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Tennessee could cost hundreds of millions of dollars in lost income for farmers and livestock markets in addition to millions of dollars in disease monitoring and control costs. (The impact of the foot and mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom went far beyond agriculture. The cost to U.K. tourism, for example, exceeded the costs to agriculture). Many U.S. trading partners have had an animal tracking system in place for

years. The U.S. will be expected to produce traceable livestock and livestock products in order to compete for critical export markets in the future. Increasingly, domestic markets are demanding traceable livestock and livestock products. Tennessee farmers could lose competitiveness, access to markets and income if they don't participate in an animal identification system. The cost of electronic identification tags are affordable and do not cost much more than traditional ear tags. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture is working to help reduce or offset costs to producers and market operators who participate in the program.

FICTION: *Traditional methods of identification such as branding and metal tags are cheaper and just as effective in identifying livestock.*

FACT: Visual ear tags complying with NAIS standards are an approved means of identification of animals moving in commerce. While metal tags and branding have been used effectively in the past for brucellosis eradication and other programs, they are simply unsuitable and impractical for today's vast and modern livestock marketing and transportation system. Identification methods requiring manual reading and recording would ultimately be more time consuming, subject to human error and costly to producers and market operators. It is expected that markets will use other forms of identification that are available to ensure that animal identification "moves at the speed of commerce." The various electronic mediums now available offer us the ability to implement an affordable, accurate and quick system of recording and tracing livestock through commerce with minimum disruption to market flow.

FICTION: *I will be required to tag and identify each and every chicken I own.*

FACT: Species that are moved in groups such poultry and swine will be identified by lots not individual animals. Methods of identification and tracking are being developed with input by livestock species working groups taking into consideration the uniqueness of each species and the economic impact to their producers.

FICTION: *I will be required to tag and identify my dogs and cats.*

FACT: Dog, cats and pets in general are not a part of the plan for the NAIS, only livestock species. Currently, species working groups comprised of industry and government representatives are developing plans for cattle, swine, sheep, goats, horses, poultry, bison, deer, elk, llamas and alpacas.

FICTION: *The NAIS is an attempt to mandate burdensome regulations on producers.*

FACT: The Tennessee Department of Agriculture supports voluntary participation in the NAIS. USDA and its cooperators are working toward a national system capable of tracing diseased or exposed animals and that will meet the needs of animal owners, markets and consumers. We support this industry-driven approach to development. As the system takes shape, USDA will reassess the need for making some or all aspects of the program mandatory on the federal level. We believe that it is important that Tennessee producers fully participate in the system so that, whether voluntary, market-driven or mandatory, they will be in a better position to care for, manage and market their livestock in the future.

Learn More About It:

For more information about the NAIS in Tennessee, visit the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Premises ID Web site at www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/tpis.

Other helpful links for more information and Frequently Asked Questions:

- USDA's Official NAIS Web site – www.usda.gov/nais
- USDA Animal ID Factsheets and FAQs - <http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/newsroom/factsheets>
- National Institute for Animal Agriculture – www.animalagriculture.org/id
- NAIA Facts and Myths (PDF) - <http://animalagriculture.org/id/NAIS%20letter1.pdf>
- USDA-APHIS, Veterinary Services Animal Identification - www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahps/animal_id